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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: NON PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION CALLS FOR
PRESIDENT'S OUSTER, AGAIN

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary/Comment: The non-parliamentary opposition announced and distributed its Declaration of Political Parties and Civil Society Organizations of Georgia (Declaration) which calls for President Saakashvili's resignation; early presidential and parliamentary elections; and the establishment of conditions for conducting free and fair elections. Nineteen non-parliamentary leaders and ten civil society leaders, including former Speaker Nino Burjanadze, signed the Declaration. Notably absent from signing were former Georgian Ambassador to the UN Irakli Alasania, and former Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli; however, according to the press, both "agreed" in principle with the document (although Noghaideli is on record as opposing new elections now). The Declaration leaves unanswered what policies the group would pursue; whether parliamentary or presidential elections would come first and how either could be accomplished in a constitutional framework; and how "free and fair" election conditions would be established. The Declaration drew substantial media coverage, but has drawn little notice from the public. In our view, the Declaration amounts to a codification of the non-parliamentary opposition's previous demands and reinforces the view that about the only issue they can agree on is their strong dislike of President Saakashvili. For the most part, this Declaration which was to explain the non-parliamentary agenda in detail and unite democratic forces failed to deliver a coordinated, coherent plan. End Summary/Comment.

Declaration Announced - Non-Parliamentary Opposition Ratchets Up the Rhetoric

¶2. (SBU) The Declaration was announced on January 29 in the Tbilisi Marriott to widespread media coverage. Imedi, Rustavi, and Georgian Public Broadcasting showed clips of the signing and interviews with various opposition leaders. The weekly English language, Georgia Today had a front page photo and caption. Virtually every Georgian newspaper had at least a mention of the Declaration on the front page. David Gamkrelidze (New Rights), Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way), and Eka Beselia (Movement for a United Georgia, aka Okruashvili's party) were quoted extensively. Gamkrelidze stated that "(t)oday one demand, one goal unites us - to get rid of Saakashvili". Gamkrelidze continued saying that "(t)hose who do not share our position will automatically be enlisted to the governmental team. There is a certain watershed, demarcation lines between the real opposition and the rest of the political forces." Zourabichvili added that "Saakashvili should resign and there is no longer any other issue. If we do not achieve this no other issues will be important because the country will no longer exist."

¶3. (C) The Declaration states that Saakashvili's lawlessness and violence have driven Georgia to catastrophe, and that each day he remains in power generates additional problems for Georgia. It continues with the aforementioned demands and says that it is a civic duty to immediately effect regime change by constitutional means. The

Declaration calls on the public to secure free and democratic development and unification. What it does not say is what would constitute "constitutional" means or any legal justification for holding new elections or demanding the resignation of Saakashvili. Thea Gogvadze-Apfel, a Burjanadze confidante, told Poloff that the Declaration, a subject of discussion among the non-parliamentary opposition Qsubject of discussion among the non-parliamentary opposition for a period of months, represents the only level at which the non-parliamentary opposition could agree. The harsh rhetoric is also a clear call to fence sitters such as Alasania, and Noghaideli that their equivocation is increasingly irritating to the non-parliamentary crowd.

Opposition's Unity Moment Quickly Inundated by Reality

¶4. (C) The "unity" among non-parliamentary forces looks thin, since they spent three months coalescing around a document of minimalist non-parliamentary demands. In a moment of clarity, Shalva Natelashvili (Labor Party leader) said "I agree with the principles of the memorandum but I am not signing it. I mean how many times can we sign one and the same thing? We've been doing this since 2003." Natelashvili went on to blast other non-parliamentary figures saying "(i)t is unacceptable for me to sign the declaration, as by signing it other opposition leaders may make me stand next to Burjanadze or Noghaideli." Irakli Melashvili (National Forum) said he did not sign the document because the non-parliamentary opposition has no idea as to how it is going to enforce its demands. Melashvili said "(w)e have asked the opposition parties what they will do if Saakashvili holds a new election. We have not received a clear answer and that's why we have refused o sign this document."

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Parliamentary opposition MP Gia Tsagareishvili (Democratic Party of Georgia) said opposition MPs were not consulted. He continued saying "(i)f somebody does not want to see my face, I am not interested in them. I am not going to go somewhere to see them. Let them come, talk to us, tell us what they want and we will answer them."

¶5. (C) Far from uniting the non-parliamentary opposition, the Declaration only reinforces how disparate the non-parliamentary group is. Nino Burjanadze did not attend the signing preferring to travel to Davos, Switzerland for meetings. Alasania expressed his general agreement with the Declaration but refused to sign, prompting editorial pages and non-parliamentary leaders alike to question where his loyalties lie. In fact, the non-parliamentary opposition could not agree on whether or when to hold protests. Protests may be held in the spring but it remains unclear which parties will participate. Natelashvili, whose Labor Party formed a bulk of the protesters in November 2007, has said he would not protest for the benefit of former GOG officials such as Burjanadze, Alasania, and Noghaideli. At the end of the day, the Declaration creates more questions than it answers.

¶6. (C) Parliamentary Speaker David Bakradze lamented the radicalization of political discourse. He was quoted as saying "(u)nfortunately, part of the opposition sticks with a radical stance. I think that instead of further radicalization, the population today needs to see the cooperation of different parties on vital issues, such as overcoming the economic crisis and ensuring security in the country." Bakradze also pointed out the inherent contradiction in the non-parliamentary opposition demands, questioning how one can call for both the reform of the election code and immediate elections at the same time. While the non-parliamentary opposition will continue to be a thorn in the Government's side, the recent Declaration does not suggest the non-parliamentary has found a way to pose a true threat to Saakashvili or the UNM.

TEFFT